



House Select Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

JIM TURNER, Ranking Member

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Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security made the following statement at a hearing of the full committee on “Practice Makes Perfect: Strengthening Homeland Security by Exercising Terrorism Scenarios.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Director Mencer, welcome back. Mr. Mefferd and Mr. Kimmerer, welcome to Washington. Thank you all for appearing before the Select Committee today, and I look forward to your testimony on the Department of Homeland Security's exercise programs, and specifically the TOPOFF exercise series.

The Department of Homeland Security, and particularly the Office for Domestic Preparedness, plays a crucial role in preparing our country to win the war on terror. It oversees a range of programs to prepare our first responders, individually, and our communities, more broadly, to prepare for and respond to acts of terrorism. It is critical that the job is done right.

Effective exercises at all levels of government are a key component of our terrorism preparedness activities. The Arlington County, Virginia Fire Department's after-action report on their response to the 9-11 attack noted that frequent training and exercises with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Pentagon, and the Military District of Washington made a substantial contribution to their successful response operation.

Therefore, the Department is to be commended for its commitment to a robust exercise program, particularly the TOPOFF program, and for the efforts it has undertaken to provide state and local governments with guidance on developing and conducting exercises.

However, there are several issues that I would like you to address either in your testimony or in response to the Committee's questions.

First, I am concerned that in the development of exercise scenarios, DHS does not utilize threat and vulnerability information to guide its choice of either the location of the incident, or the mode of terrorist attack. Why don't the TOPOFF exercises focus on what the intelligence assessment indicates is a city's highest vulnerability? I am afraid that Department's inability to develop a comprehensive threat and vulnerability assessment – which has been noted by this Committee on numerous occasions – has a significant, negative impact on the conduct of your exercise program.

Second, how is DHS measuring the effectiveness of its exercise program? What “readiness” level are you seeking to achieve in the exercise venues, and how does the conduct of an exercise contribute to a state or local government's overall preparedness? Following an

exercise, do DHS and the participating states and localities have a clear understanding of what additional planning, training, and equipment are necessary to fully prepare the impacted communities?

Third, while the actual conduct of exercises is important, it is equally important to fix the problems revealed by the exercise. The TOPOFF exercise we will hear about today took place over a year ago, in May of 2003. At this point, while I am interested in how the exercise was carried out, I am much more interested in how both DHS and the cities of Seattle and Chicago addressed any shortfalls in their response operations. For example, the after-action report for the TOPOFF 2 exercises noted the following:

- There was little understanding of inter- and intra-agency command and control protocols, and many exercise players did not fully understand the reporting relationships among federal officials;
- A number of major, pre-existing interagency federal plans and processes were circumvented during the exercise;
- There were logistical difficulties accessing DHS assets and resources; and
- A lack of a robust and efficient emergency communications infrastructure in Chicago's hospital system impeded response, and resource demands challenged these hospitals throughout the exercise.

I am interested in understanding how you have improved your operations since the exercise to assure us, and the nation, that in the event of a real terrorist attack, we will not repeat the same mistakes. Therefore, I would appreciate a description of how any lessons learned from the exercise have been incorporated into either the Department's, or your city's, day-to-day policy decisions, and the specific corrective actions you have undertaken to remedy any operational deficiencies.

Finally, I am not convinced that the Department is taking full advantage of the exercise knowledge and expertise resident in a number of its components, such as FEMA and the Coast Guard. These agencies were conducting multi-agency, intergovernmental exercises long before the Department of Homeland Security was created. I recognize that the Office for Domestic Preparedness has been tasked with managing the National Exercise Program; however, DHS must begin the process of integrating the vast resources under its control to build the most effective programs.

As you can see, I have many questions and concerns about the Department's exercise program. I hope that in addition to describing your experiences in the TOPOFF 2 exercise, you can directly address the questions I have raised. Thank you for being here, and I look forward to your testimony.

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